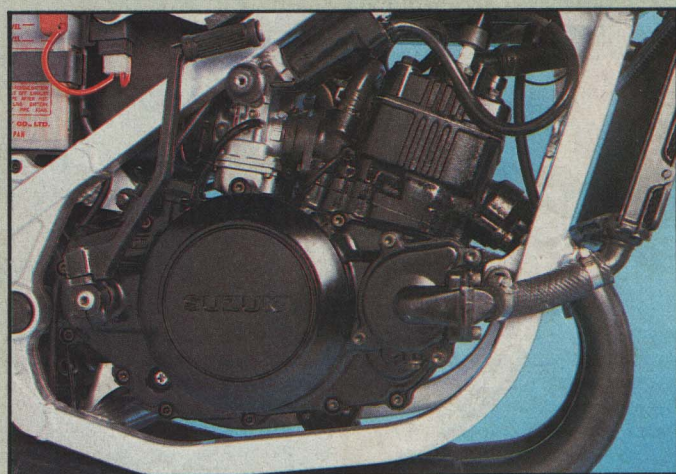


BETA GETTA GAMMA

But only if you want the most advanced handling lightweight ever offered. John Nutting was the first to ride the RG250 in the UK.



Racer-stuff for the road — the RG250's alloy frame is a visual treat.



The Gamma's motor is a conventional parallel twin two-stroke — the trick is, it pumps out 45bhp!

Photography by Ian McKinnell & Colin Schiller

If that eternal arbiter of everyday tastes, the man on the Clapham omnibus, had any say in the matter, it's doubtful if we would have ever seen the Suzuki RG250 Gamma in the UK. Although there's nothing intrinsically wrong with quarter litre bikes, in the wake of the 125cc learner legislation public opinion turned against them for some obscure reason and their second-hand values slumped. The manufacturers naturally pruned their ranges in the UK, but now that the 250cc class is re-assuming the same level of status as most others outside the 125s, values are starting to climb again. And thanks to a visionary in the Heron-Suzuki organisation, the RG250 Gamma will be on sale in Britain

in September.

The fact that the RG250 Gamma exists at all is not because of some new pioneering spirit at Suzuki. In Japan, the 250cc class enjoys special licensing favours and as a result has seen a home market sales war with Honda which launched its VT250F vee-twin early last year with remarkable success. That bike opened the flood gates and soon after Yamaha released its Power-Valve RZ250R (a smaller version of our RD350LC), Honda replied with the MVX-250F two-stroke triple. Against that background it was natural for Suzuki to exploit its world championship winning RG500 machines' image to launch the RG250 Gamma.

We should make no apologies however for featuring the Gamma so soon after Yoki Ogawa's test from Japan in the June issue. After being the first to ride the bike in the UK I can now safely say that it is one of the most phenomenal two-strokes ever offered for sale. From the initial reports of the bike I had the impression that this was going to be hard, twitchy little bugger. No such thing. While the Gamma is

indeed as light as we hoped, tipping the scales at under 300 pounds with a full tank, its suspension under the weight of a heavier-than-your-usual-Jap Brit rider is smooth, controlled and beautifully damped.

Neither is the engine as uncontrollably peaky as I'd first imagined it to be. Yes, the power does come on strong at 7,000 and compared to what's happening in the power band when the

engine's chiming, the torque in the lower regions is nothing to get excited about. But by some clever design, the motor will pull away cleanly from stops in bottom gear without having to rev it hard enough to show a reading on the tacho, which like any racing instrument, starts at 3,000.

But if you conclude from this that the UK-bound Gamma is a poor emasculated creature compared to its Japanese counterpart, think again. It's every bit as quick as expected and more importantly, handles better than I thought possible for such a light bike. If any Gammas get into the 250 production class with a handy rider aboard, the LC Yamaha boys are going to be struggling.

Better still, the Gamma is a visual treat, the styling of the bodywork and fairing following the factory's racing 500cc square fours faithfully enough to trick a casual glance into thinking it was The Real Thing. Even close up the Gamma rewards the trained eye with its light-alloy fairing bracketry, etched alloy footrest hangers, cap screw fastenings, black anodised wheels, racer-styled rubber mounted speedo and tacho set in a matt black mounting, light-alloy footrests with spring loaded catches and ball-ended wear prongs and even an aircraft style fuel filler cap that's flush with the top of the tank when closed.

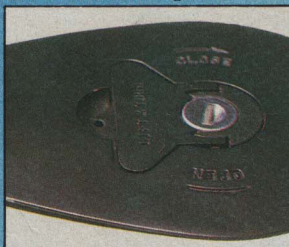
But the outside appearance of the engine doesn't really give any clues to the source of the greatest amount of power ever extracted from a road 250cc twin. This is 45bhp at 8,500rpm, two horses up on Yamaha's RZ250R and five on the three-cylinder Honda. Plainly a water-cooled parallel twin with a layout similar to the earlier air-cooled GT250X7 engine, the RG uses no fancy exhaust port trickery or disc inlet valves. It does use large 28mm-choke Mikuni carburettors with flat slides similar to the type used on the RM125 motorcrossers that breathe from massive air filters and into dual inlet ports.

One port is in the rear of the cylinder wall and opened by the piston in the conventional manner, while the other is a reed-valve beneath the inlet port that opens direct into the crankcase. From the specifications, the engine runs on a rather high 7.5:1 compression ratio for better low and mid-range power. But this is difficult to achieve in a production engine without running the risk of cylinder head squish bands becoming too close to the piston at top centre with the risk of detonation and piston failure. Clearly, Suzuki's engineers ensure that the motor is carefully assembled or that the heads are precisely keyed to the cylinders.

The Gamma's exhaust system does show that they've used ideas gleaned from racing experience. The exhaust pipes emerge straight from the cylinders and



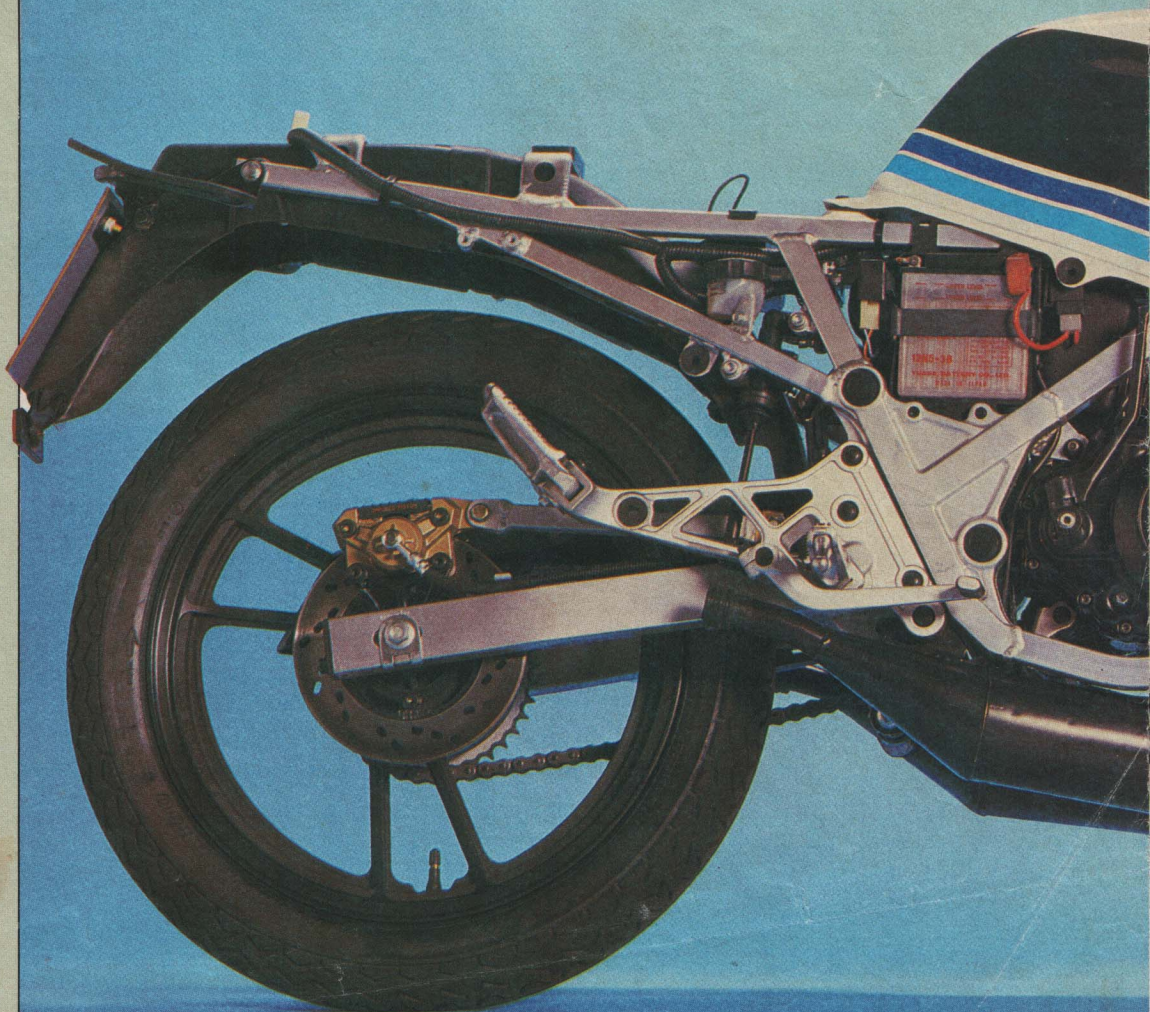
Clocks mock racing tackle too — they're rubber mounted and the tacho starts at three grand.



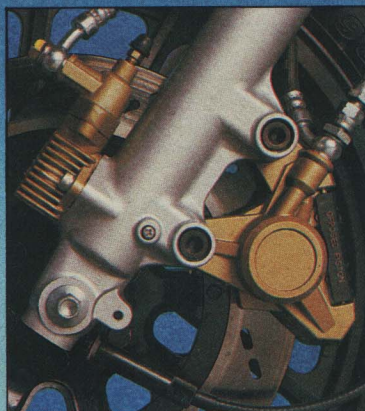
Filler is an aircraft-style flush-fitting type that also covers the oil cap.



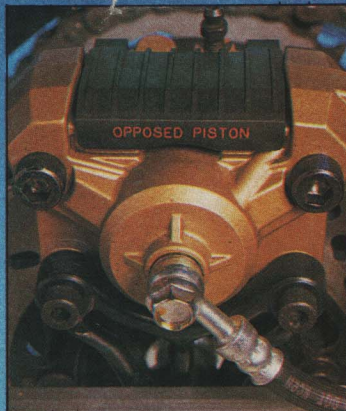
The Gamma's got an answer for every rider input. And it'll do if you're up to it!



Suzuki's RG250 Gamma borrows heavily from the factory's racers in styling, component similarity and technology. But they got the whole package right too — it doesn't just look right, it feels it too.



Brake is a single disc with an opposed-piston caliper and it works beautifully. Anti-dive works better on the light Gamma.



Could this have come from a Mk8 RG500? It looks like it did.

practically anything you want —



follow large-radius arcs under the engine with triple tapers for the expansion chambers. Sharp bends or kinks in an exhaust system on a two-stroke invariably reduce the effectiveness of the resonances which are so vital to power and even more so on an engine as highly turned as the Gamma. Separate silencers with alloy jackets slip over the tail pipes and mute the sound to a reasonable level.

Overall gearing in the highest of the six ratios is fairly short, although 103mph at the 9,000rpm red line might sound high by the standards for 250cc two-strokes that we've been used to. Even so, the Gamma will pull past that into the depths of the red line to give over 110mph before running short of steam. Fortunately, it isn't necessary to be as brutal in the lower gears because the ratios are so well disposed that if you're the sort that rides around with the engine in the power band you won't find that the gearbox drops you out of it. Here the RG250 is at its best, delivering startling acceleration that puts it in the low 13 second bracket for the quarter mile. According to tests in Japan, the Gamma is the quickest with 13.5s while the Honda MVX's is 13.88s and the RZ250R Yamaha's is 14.1s.

Unlike racing Yamahas tuned to the same pitch as the Gamma, the Suzuki isn't a handful at low revs either. It starts easily, warms up quickly and even pulls reasonably well from just over an idle, making town use less of a chore than some bigger bikes with more peaky engines. The motor's smooth too. The rubber mounts absorbing practically all vibration except when you have to use the gear lever.

But if the engine is a gem then the Gamma's handling is a revelation. Like most racing frames, the all-arc-welded structure on the RG is extremely compact and leaves very little room around the engine. Made from HE30 aircraft alloy, it uses forged sections for the rear suspension and swing arm mounts that take highest loading and from which run straight sections to the steering head. This is doubly braced and very wide to spread the loads. The rear Full Floater suspension is all-alloy too with a forged lever arm and links which are protected from the elements by rubber boots. Although the wheelbase is a fairly normal 54.5 inches the frame is very low at the front with very widely spaced yokes for the fork. This uses 35mm tubes and has separate air valves and appears to be so strong that it can get away with a small diameter wheel spindle and no brace for the sliders.

For a bike that is so light the stability of the Gamma was really surprising. You sit, or rather perch on the bike in the same way as you might on a racer. The footrests are pitched high but because the handlebars are not too low the riding stance isn't too

BETA GITA GAMMA

awkward and at speed the screen on the fairing tips the air comfortably over the rider's head at about 80mph. At first contact, the bike feels like a small toy compared to other 250cc bikes but at speed the way it sits on the road is more reminiscent of heavier bikes with lush suspension offering a useful amount of movement and barely any signs of stickiness in its action.

Toss the Gamma into a corner and that same feeling of stability is retained but with no ill effect on the steering. It's light, very light, yet precise and neutral and you can tip the bike over until the footpeg projections graze the tarmac without any impression of queeziness in the steering or suspension. The steering itself can mostly be attributed to the torsional strength of the front fork

SPECIFICATIONS

Model	Suzuki RG250 Gamma
Price inc taxes	tba
Warranty	12 mnths/unltd
Customer Contact	Heron-Suzuki GB Ltd, 46-62 Gatwick Rd, Crawley, West Sussex. Tel: 0293 518000

ENGINE

Type	Liquid-cooled case-reed 2-str twin
Capacity	247cc
Bore/Stroke	54 x 54mm
Lubrication	Oil injection
Comp. ratio	7.5:1 (corrected)
Carburation	2xMikuni 28mm flat slide
Ignition	Pointless electronic
Power (bhp)	45 @ 8,500rpm
Torque (lb-ft)	27.4 @ 8,000rpm

TRANSMISSION

Primary drive	Gear
Clutch	Wet multi-plate
Gearbox	Six speed
Final drive	Sealed 520 chain
Overall ratios	20.5, 13.3, 9.9, 8.19, 7.07 & 6.4:1

ELECTRICS

Power source	Alternator
Battery	12V 5Ah
Headlamp	60/55W quartz

CHASSIS

Frame	Light-alloy duplex cradle
Front susp.	Telescopic air fork with anti-dive
Rear susp.	Alloy swing arm c/w single shock linkage and remote preload adj.
Front brake	270mm disc, dual piston caliper
Rear brake	210mm disc, dual piston caliper
Tyre type	Dunlop F14/K130
Tyre sizes	100/90-16-54S; 100/90-18-56S

CAPACITIES

Fuel tank	3.7 gal (17 l)
Oil	1.2 l

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	54.5in (1385mm)
Seat height	31.1in (790mm)
H-bar width	26.8in (680mm)
Grnd clrnce	5.9in (150mm)
Rake/trail	61.25deg/102mm
Dry weight	288lb (131kg)

PERFORMANCE

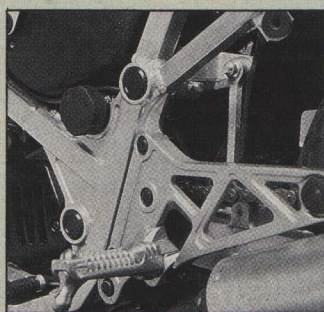
Top speed	113 mph (est)
St 1/4-mile(mean)	13.7s/96mph (est)
Test weight	298lb (full tank)
Speed in gears	32mph, 50mph, 67mph, 81mph, 95mph & 104mph @ 9,000rpm
Fuel cons.	45mpg (est)
Range	165 miles

EQUIPMENT

Top fairing, mirrors, turn signals, steering lock, side stand, seat lock, fuel lock, tool kit, speedo, tachometer.



This is what it's all about — playing racers.



Full Floater single shock rear suspension uses alloy links and rocker arm — it's supple and smooth in action.

and the use of a 16-inch wheel, which like the rear tyre has a 100/90 (100mm wide with a 90 percent aspect ratio) cover like the rear end. The tyres in this case were Dunlops but we'd hope for more sticky rubber because these items felt fairly hard and had difficulty in cranking up enough temperature for adequate grip, unlike the Michelins the factory fits for home consumption.

For Britain, the Gamma will come fitted with a single disc

brake on the front wheel along with anti-dive valving on the front fork. And just as on the racers, the rear disc is a smaller diameter because a bigger one would add to the unsprung weight and after all, a small one is all that's necessary when most of the braking power comes from the front wheel.

Despite the apparent asymmetry of the single disc it performed flawlessly, delivering eye-popping power with good feel and no twisting on the fork legs. The anti-dive appeared to work better than on the bigger Suzukis too, possibly because of the lower weight transfer. The brake calipers use opposed pistons in strong flex-free bodies giving the more linear response.

Machines like the Gamma push motorcycling more into the arena of superficial indulgence than ever before. It has all the trappings of a racer, and will indeed be successful as one when suitably converted, yet works well on the road. It has all the equipment of a road bike, like a dual seat, the front section of

which can be unlocked, stylish detailing, good lights, substantial air filters and even a grease fitting for the rear suspension. It has crude-looking instruments, all calculated to give the impression of racer orientation.

And then there is the alloy frame which although has adequate strength has questionable durability. There's no centre stand, as that would add too much weight. The bike undeniably flaunts itself successfully as a road-going racer and massages the rider's ego. Most important however, it does this with a pack of credentials that take it above the level of the normal road bike and it does this without sacrificing comfort or flexibility.

The only question mark left concerns the price. The bike sells for about £1,250 in Japan. That puts the Gamma at about £1,550 in the UK. Good though it certainly is, will Heron-Suzuki use the same tactics as for the Turbo and pitch the price lower to gain more sales? At any price, the Gamma is a remarkable experience.

WB?